

Abroad

Port-au-Prince

The Meaning of Poverty

Pope John Paul II's swing through Central America and the Caribbean Basin, beginning this week, will take him to an episcopal conference in the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince, where he will be obliged to confront what must be the poorest and most consistently miserable country in the Western world. Haiti has the proud history of having become the first black independent nation when its slave heroes threw off the domination of the French colonial regime almost two hundred years ago. Yet ever since, the Haitians have been sinking downward on the political and economic scale. In recent years they have been at the political mercy of the ferocious Duvalier dynasty—first the bloodthirsty Papa Doc, who became "president for life" in 1964, and now his son, Bébé Doc—which has exploited the country's traditional political corruption with unprincipled violence. No other country receives so much foreign aid and is yet so poor. Six Western countries, the U.S. most heavily, contribute to keep the Haitian economy alive. So do six multinational lending agencies and almost 150 private organizations, many of them religious. This money keeps the crops irrigated, the roads paved, the streetlights burning, the schools and hospitals open, and a whole range of "salvation" agricultural experiments functioning in an overpopulated country of six million inhabitants on the western third of the island of Hispaniola. As an example of its problems, Haiti must replace its entire pig population this year because of an infestation of swine fever, and it has hardly a dozen veterinarians in the whole country. The United States, whose Marine Corps occupied the country from 1915 to 1934, has taken first responsibility, but despite enormous private and public investment and fifty years of work by dedicated battalions of civil servants, engineers, doctors, and bankers, the vast majority of Haitians still live below the absolute poverty line of \$135 per capita per year.

Budapest

Freedom Pushing

Hungary is soon scheduled to establish a free-trade zone for joint ventures involving foreign companies and local business, in another move to open its commercial door wider to the West and set its trade policies apart from those of other Eastern bloc countries. According to an announcement here, this will mean the creation of "off-shore" manufacturing sites where made-for-export goods would be sold tariff-free. Theoretically, the new trade zone would function along the lines of the huge free-trade ports of Hong Kong, Miami, Panama, and Hamburg. Hungary's successful trade policy has put it in the position, unique in Eastern Europe, of running a high-rate convertible currency balance account. It already has some seventy joint trade and marketing ventures abroad, mainly in the Common Market, and the new free-trade zone will enhance its international position, especially as guarantees of investment and profit repatriation go with it. The Foreign Ministry says that one American company has already made an offer for the joint manufacture of printed circuits.

Athens

Multifaces

Socialist Premier Andreas Papandreu probably never thought the NATO bases in Greece, which he has so frequently denounced, would be giving him so much trouble. President Reagan, for example, will not consider increasing military aid until the status of these "death bases," as some of Papandreu's supporters refer to them, has been settled. Papandreu thinks the bases should be used principally to "confront the threat in the Aegean," meaning less the Soviet Union than Greece's fellow NATO member Turkey. In the middle of all this, Soviet Prime Minister Nikolai Tikhonov turned up in Athens to sign a ten-year treaty strengthening economic and scientific relations between the two countries—an indication of what Papandreu calls Greece's "genuinely multifaceted" foreign policy.

Darjeeling

The Ultimate Huff and Puff

Two Englishmen—brothers, and both geologists, Richard and Adrian Crane, 29 and 27—are getting ready for what must be one of the strangest marathons of all time, a 2,500-mile charity run across the Roof of the World. The Cranes are undertaking this feat on behalf of the "small is beautiful" principle of the late Dr. E. F. Schumacher, and if they complete it they will donate a purse of £250,000 (\$380,000) to the London-based Intermediate Technology Development Group, an obscure charity specializing in Third World development projects along "small is beautiful" lines. The marathon will take the brothers from Darjeeling over the Himalayas to the Mount Everest base camp and then to Katmandu in Nepal. They will end the journey at Rawalpindi in Pakistan and will have run at an average height of 12,000 feet. The brothers say they are "mountaineers first, adventurers second, and runners third." There is no present estimate of how long it will take them.



Fisher, Pursh

Roche

"On the other hand, because of the biased and distorted reportage of Third World matters by the influential Western news media, maybe we only think life is lousy here."